



FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF WEST PAPUA

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FOR MEDIA: First English translation of Dutch guerrilla's memoir of WWII in West Papua published before showdown with Indonesia in the 2019 UN General Assembly

We fought in the jungle; My guerilla struggle in Dutch New Guinea in the Second World War (Vijvochten in het bos by Sergeant Maurits Kokkelink, Amsterdam, 1956), translated by Dutch-Australian writer Henri Licht, published by West Papua Women's Office in Docklands (Vic)

LAUNCH Sunday 4 August 2019 : 2pm, Ground floor boardroom, 838 Collins St, Docklands.
Guest Speaker Henri Licht, Dutch-Australian writer and Tolstoy scholar who translated the memoir

As a petition snakes around the world exhorting the Australian government to vote for West Papua's registration on the UN Decolonisation List, the first English translation of a WWII memoir by a Dutch-Indo guerrilla-fighter is published by the West Papua Women's Office in Docklands.

We fought in the jungle: the guerrilla struggle in New Guinea in the Second World War is an extraordinary story of courage, ferocity, and the determination of men, a woman and teenage girl as they fight and evade Japanese military in West Papua from April 1942 until the dramatic and devastating arrival of MacArthur's US-Australian taskforces in April 1944. In the beginning there were 73 men, a teenage-girl and her aunt; thirty months later there were sixteen men and the girl.

MAURITS KOKKELINK was a settler scratching a living from West Papua's mountainous terrain when Hitler occupied his father's homeland in 1940 and when Japan bombed his little hut in Manokwari on the north coast in April 1942. Rather than surrender, the farmer turned conscript, then guerilla and learned freedom-fighting on-the-job: hunted like animals, surviving on roots and leaves, shooting and seizing weapons, hiding in mud in mosquito-infested mangrove swamps with no water; there was a marriage-based alliance with a Papuan chief. Haunted by a ten-thousand-guilder bounty on their heads, Kokkelink and two of his men even jumped, during the night, from a cliff into a river thirty metres below. It was not until 4 October 1944—after Macarthur's taskforce had thoroughly bombed West Papua's north coast—that Kokkelink permitted a Papuan runner to contact a Dutch-military search party. Tired and malnourished he nevertheless went onto to find and liberate 170 Dutch women and children from an internment camp in the jungle; led a taskforce cleaning up Japanese troops on Noemfoor Island, entered occupied Manokwari dressed like a Papuan and found the enemy's radar station that was still intercepting Allied air traffic between Brisbane and New Guinea. Then he returned to his small plot in the mountains behind Manokwari to rebuild his home in the land he'd learned to love and had done so much to defend. But West Papua was no place for this Indo-Dutchman after the United Nations gifted West Papua to Indonesia in 1962, and

Kokkelink and his family was forced to seek refuge in Holland, then Suriname (a constituent country of the Netherlands) and ultimately in French Guiana where he died in 1995.

THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF WEST PAPUA IN DOCKLANDS is publishing this English translation of the war-time memoir because it is a Papuan story as much as a Dutch story; about a time when 'self-determination' over-rode the benevolent paternalism that had characterized Dutch governance before the war, and colonizer and colonised worked together for a more equitable future. Kokkelink, Vic de Bruijn, Jan van Eecloud, Joseph Luns, are just a few of the Dutch men and women who influenced the West Papuan's shift from a nation of tribes to the nation-state they are today, and worked with them against Indonesia's colonization of an indigenous Melanesian people. Kokkelink's script therefore needs to be in the suitcase as Vanuatu advances its motion in the UN General Assembly to register West Papua on the UN Decolonisation List (note that there has never been a referendum in West Papua).

HENRI LICHT, who translated the work, has always been a strong advocate of Canberra recognizing West Papuans' sovereignty over the magnificent land they have called home for centuries. He lives with his Sikh wife Ubdes, his water tanks and a large garden in the Dandenongs; is a Tolstoy scholar, regards himself as an anarcho-socialist, and was once the Vice-Principal of Lilydale High School and a lecturer at Victoria University. Currently he is writing a novel about English convict boys sent to Point Puer in the Tasman peninsula between 1834 and 1849. His 2015 memoir *By the scruff of the neck; a suitcase of memories* captures his family's migration to Australia in 1952 and life in the Bonegilla migrant camp.

Henri believes Kokkink's memoir not only deserves a place in the pantheon of great WWII stories but was an important prelude to the Netherland's recognition of Indonesia's independence in 1949 and registration of West Papua with the United Nations as a Non-Self-Governing Territory in 1950. Kokkelink was born in Java of Dutch-Indonesian parentage and a settler in West Papua for six years before the Japanese invasion. He'd been brought up believing West Papua was geographically and politically separate from the rest of Indonesia, but while fighting alongside (and a couple of times against) West Papuans during the war he learned the distinction was also ethnic and cultural. He loved the territory and the people and continued to live and work his small farm after the war. Remarkably, given how tough surviving the Japanese occupation forced this young Dutchman to become, he admitted 'my eyes filled with tears' as Mika, his Papuan mate and fellow guerilla, died in his arms after being shot by a Japanese soldier.

INQUIRIES

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